



Mercer County Public Schools

DEBORAH S. AKERS, Ed.D.
Superintendent

1403 Honaker Avenue ☆ Princeton, West Virginia 24740 ☆ (304) 487-1551 ☆
<http://boe.merc.k12.wv.us>

November 25, 2014

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW
Washington, DC 20554

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am writing today in response to FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler's recently announced proposal to raise the E-Rate funding cap by \$1.5 billion. The E-Rate program currently represents the only source of federal funding aimed at educational technology and is critical in providing discounts to assist schools (like mine) to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access. As Superintendent in Mercer County Schools, Princeton, WV, I strongly support the infusion of the additional funding, and urge you to do the same.

Mercer County Schools uses E-Rate dollars to support access for our 9,600 plus students. Without this funding, we would have to cut services. Additional funding would allow us to address internal connectivity needs on a much quicker basis. Presently, we are in the position of slowly phasing in improvements.

To raise the cap of the E-Rate program by \$1.5 billion, the Universal Service Fund fee will increase by 16 cents per month per account. 16 additional cents per month—less than half a penny per day—totals to an additional \$1.92 per year, approximately the cost of a cup of coffee. This proposal is both reasonable and justified, asking contributors to forgo one cup of coffee over the course of a year to ensure that our nation's schools and libraries are connected to the internet in a way that supports 21st century learning and prepares them for post-secondary opportunity.

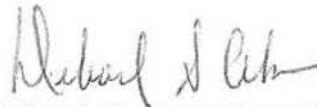
No one questions that it is time to ensure that our libraries and schools are connected with the quality of connectivity that is sufficient and scalable for today's ever-growing connectivity needs. In less than twenty years since Congress established the program, E-Rate played a critical role in transforming levels of connectivity from less than one-quarter of schools and libraries to nearly all connected today. The E-Rate program's work is not done: Achieving the laudable broadband goals adopted by the Commission in July will require additional investment. The biggest obstacle the E-Rate program faces, even with the recent changes, remains the strain of increasing demand for E-Rate-supported services and persistently low funding.

The single most effective step the FCC can take to bolster E-Rate's current and future success is to ensure that the program's funding is adequate to support, in a sustainable manner, the program's

changes and goals as adopted in July. Chairman Wheeler's proposal does just that, representing a deliberate effort to expand educational opportunities for our nation's students. By focusing on high-capacity broadband connections to the internet (particularly those in rural communities) and providing sustained, additional funding to the E-Rate program, the modernized E-Rate will ensure the nation's schools—including mine—are able to keep pace with ever increasing connectivity needs.

Thank you for considering my response as you move forward with your decision on the E-Rate program and its funding. I applaud Chairman Wheeler and the FCC for its continued efforts to protect the already oversubscribed E-Rate program by ensuring the future of this successful program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Deborah S. Akers". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Deborah S. Akers, Superintendent
Mercer County Schools

DSA/klw